

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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SUBJ: COMMUNAL RIOTS IN PORT MORESBY

1. SUMMARY: COMMUNAL RIOTS JULY 22-23 IN PORT MORESBY HAVE SUBSIDED AFTER SOME VIOLENCE, PROPERTY DAMAGE, AND ABOUT 80 ARRESTS. NO LIVES REPORTED LOST AND NO AMERICANS INVOLVED. RIOTS SPARKED BY THREE SPORTS VICTORIES BY PAPUAN OVER NEW GUINEA TEAMS OVER WEEKEND, AGAINST BACKGROUND OF RISING COMMUNAL TENSIONS AND DEMANDS FOR SEPARATION OF PAPUA FROM NEW GUINEA. DISTURBANCES CONTAINED BY RAPID POLICE INTERVENTION, BUT EVENTS TEND TO CONFIRM DARK FOREBODINGS MANY AUSTRALIANS HAVE OVER FUTURE COURSE OF PNG IN NEXT FEW YEARS. END SUMMARY.

2. CALM APPEARS TO HAVE RETURNED TO PORT MORESBY FOLLOWING RIOTS IN PORT MORESBY BETWEEN PAPUANS AND NEW GUINEANS THAT BEGAN JULY 22 AND ENDED JULY 23. IMMEDIATE FOCUS OF THE DISTURBANCE WAS THE ANNUAL INTER-TERRITORY FOOTBALL MATCHES (AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL IN LAE, JULY 21; SOCCER IN PORT MORESBY, JULY 21; AND RUGBY LEAGUE FOOTBALL IN PORT MORESBY THE AFTERNOON OF JULY 22). PAPUAN TEAMS DEFEATED

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NEW GUINEAN TEAMS IN ALL THREE GAMES--AUSTRALIAN

RULES MATCH BY THUMPING 60 POINTS, SOCCER GAME BY A PENALTY GOAL, AND RUGBY LEAGUE BY SCORE OF 41 TO 19. NO DEATHS WERE REPORTED, BUT THERE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN PROPERTY DAMAGE OF SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION. NO AMERICAN CITIZENS REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED. EIGHTY PERSONS REPORTED ARRESTED, SOME OF WHOM SENTENCED TO PRISON TERMS OF TWO WEEKS TO TWO MONTHS FOR RIOTOUS BEHAVIOR AND FOR CARRYING DANGEROUS WEAPONS.

3. CHIEF MINISTER MICHAEL SOMARE MOVED QUICKLY TO CALM THE RIOTS, MEETING JULY 23 WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WHO WANTED TO STAGE MARCH FOR PEACE AND UNITY WHICH, THOUGH POTENTIALLY RISKY, IMPROVED THE ATMOSPHERE. IN RADIO BROADCAST JULY 23 SOMARE CALLED FOR AN END TO ANY FUTURE SPORTING COMPETITION QTE THAT CONTINUES THIS OUTDATED DIVISION IN OUR COUNTRY END QTE. HE SAID HE WAS SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY OF IMPOSING A CURFEW IF VIOLENCE CONTINUED TO OCCUR AND WARNED THAT QTE ANYONE WHO IS FOUND TO BE INCITING RIOT WILL BE SEVERELY DEALT WITH END QTE. DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER JOHN GUISE ALSO ISSUED STATEMENT JULY 22 CONDEMNING RIOTING AND ANNOUNCED GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED TO BAN ALL LIQUOR SALES DURING COMING MOUNT HAGEN QTE SING SING END QTE SHOW IN AUGUST, WHICH ANNUALLY ATTRACTS THOUSANDS OF VISITORS FROM ALL OVER PNG AND WHICH IS POTENTIAL FOCUS FOR FUTURE DISTURBANCES.

4. CONTRIBUTING TO COMMUNAL TENSIONS OVER PAST MONTH OR SO HAS BEEN ACTIVITY OF MISS JOSEPHINE ABAIAH, CENTRAL REGIONAL MEMBER OF HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, WHO HAS BEEN PROMOTING PAPUAN SEPARATIST MOVEMENT (PAPUA BESENI), USING ARGUMENT THAT NEW GUINEANS, WITH POPULATION OF ABOUT 1.8 MILLION, WILL INEVITABLY DOMINATE PAPUANS, WHO HAVE POPULATION OF ABOUT 0.6 MILLION, IN A UNITED, INDEPENDENT PAPUA NEW GUINEA. MISS ABAIAH, COMELY AND ABOUT 30, THE ONLY WOMAN MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, HAS HAD ONLY LIMITED RESPONSE TO HER CONCEPT OF A SEPARATE PAPUA, BUT HER EFFORTS APPEAR TO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO HEATING THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ATMOSPHERE TO POINT WHERE THE TRIPLE PAPUAN FOOTBALL VICTORIES LED TO VIOLENCE. WHEN THE RIOTING BROKE OUT, MISS ABAIAH CONFINED HER COMMENTS TO CALLING FOR IMMEDIATE STEPS TO EXPEL NEW GUINEANS FROM HER DISTRICT, NEAR PORT MORESBY.

5. COMMENT: RIOTING IS MORE INDICATIVE OF THE POTENTIAL PROBLEMS FACING A SELF-GOVERNING AND ULTI-

MATELY INDEPENDENT PAPUA NEW GUINEA THAN AN IMMEDIATE
CRISIS. TROUBLE HAS BEEN CONTAINED BY RAPID ACTION
BY THE RATHER SMALL SECURITY FORCES.

6. AS DEPT. AWARE, PAPUA AND NEW GUINEA HAVE BEEN
ADMINISTERED AS SINGLE UNIT SINCE 1947, AN ARRANGE-
MENT MORE CONVENIENT FOR AUSTRALIA THAN REFLECTIVE
OF REAL UNITY. RIOTING BETWEEN QTE PAPUANS END QTE
AND QTE NEW GUINEANS END QTE OBSCURES FACT THAT MORE
THAN 700 DIFFERENT LANGUAGES ARE IN USE IN TWO
TERRITORIES OF PAPUA AND NEW GUINEA AND THAT TRIBAL
DIFFERENCES ARE ALMOST AS GREAT. PAPUA HAS TENDED
TO CONCENTRATE ON USE OF MOTUAN AS LINGUA FRANCA,
WHILE NEW GUINEA HAS USED PIDGIN ENGLISH.

7. MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES ARE THE
MOST DIFFICULT TO ADMINISTER, AND SEQUENCE OF EVENTS
OVER PAST FEW DAYS ONLY TENDS TO CONFIRM DARK FORE-
BODINGS MANY AUSTRALIANS HAVE OVER FUTURE COURSE OF
PNG IN NEXT FEW YEARS.
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